

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 10

THEME: IS THEIR WAY BETTER?

Soon after passage of the Voting Rights Act, federal examiners were conducting voter registration drives, and black voter registration began a sharp increase. The cumulative effect of the Supreme Court's decisions, Congress' enactment of voting rights legislation, the ongoing efforts of concerned private citizens and the Department of Justice was to restore the right to vote guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments.

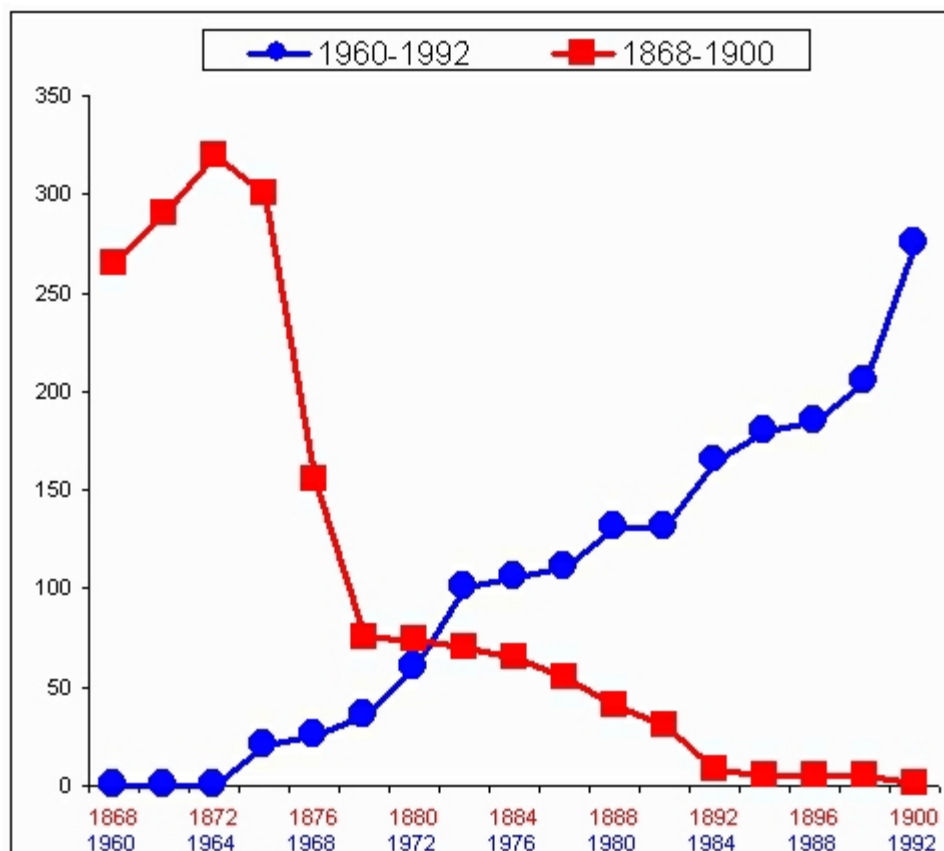
The following table compares black voter registration rates with white voter registration rates in seven Southern States in 1965 and 1988.

Voter Registration Rates (1965 vs. 1988)

	<u>March 1965</u>			<u>November 1988</u>		
	Black	White	Gap	Black	White	Gap
Alabama	19.3	69.2	49.9	68.4	75.0	6.6
Georgia	27.4	62.6	35.2	56.8	63.9	7.1
Louisiana	31.6	80.5	48.9	77.1	75.1	-2.0
Mississippi	6.7	69.9	63.2	74.2	80.5	6.3
North Carolina	46.8	96.8	50.0	58.2	65.6	7.4
South Carolina	37.3	75.7	38.4	56.7	61.8	5.1
Virginia	38.3	61.1	22.8	63.8	68.5	4.7

The following figure traces the number of black Southern legislators elected during two 32-year time periods -- from 1868 to 1900, and from 1960 to 1992.

Number of Black Southern Legislators (1868-1900 and 1960-1992)



Source: [United States Department of Justice](#)

1/ Adapted from Bernard Grofman, Lisa Handley and Richard G. Niemi. 1992. *Minority Representation and the Quest for Voting Equality*. New York: Cambridge University Press, at 23-24.

2/ Adapted from J. Morgan Kousser. 1999. *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, at 19.

An examination of the graph and the table on voter registration and voting by African-Americans quickly reveals the positive effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. When finally given legal protection to exercise their 14th & 15th Amendments right to vote, African-Americans overwhelmingly rose to the opportunity, their voting numbers swelled and they exercised their political power.

We often learn by observing and one can observe that in several nations, like Australia, the citizens are required to vote. Perhaps theirs is a better way? Today, the suffrage right of all citizens is not only guaranteed but it is also made increasingly more available. The **TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY** reveals that in the last quarter of this century, incredible steps have been taken to make not only voting but also voter registration easier and more accessible for all. Often people who should exercise, need a little nudge to get in the habit. Similarly, maybe citizens have grown a little out of shape in the exercise of their political power and they just need a nudge to get in the habit of voting. This might be the next addition to the historic road to suffrage for all; i.e., suffrage BY all.

Today we have universal suffrage but what about universal participation? Should it be given the status of DUTY? How can our society be one of "rule by the people" when a small percentage of us decide on issues and representation?

Statistics reveal that compulsory voting laws are quite effective in raising levels of participation. Furthermore, we as citizens already have many obligations imposed on us for the good of society such as taxes, the draft, and even mandatory schooling.

Teacher Notes:

Review the graph and table with your students and help them understand their significance. You might wish to explain the word "sanction" which is used at the end of their lesson.

See Student Lesson Ten; make enough copies for each student. Advise the students that when polling adults they need not get their names, only their ages. Also, suggest that students consider interviewing family and friends rather than approaching strangers at the mall or on the street. Note the call to sample a balance of ages and genders. Point to the caveat in their handout that it is essential that they write responses in case batteries or tapes fail. Remind students to make their subjects comfortable if they do employ a recording device by assuring the interviewees that their comments will not be played for the class.

This is a writing exercise also, causing the students to collate and calculate their data, draw conclusions from it and present it in an organized fashion. It is hoped that their encounter with diverse adults' opinions will help them formulate their own position on the issue.

It is also a collaboration exercise in that they are asked to explain their findings to their peers OR to use their findings in a debate on the issue. You will have to decide which route to take; perhaps poll the class to see which format students prefer. Whichever they choose, this culmination activity and the written report should provide some encouragement to do a good job on the survey and should lead them to think about their own commitments to suffrage rights.

This lesson involves interpretation of a data table and a graph. For that reason, it is a good practice lesson for the WASL and for the Advanced Placement History and Government tests.